

The Paper

Independent Fortnightly News and Opinion

March 9th- March 22nd 2001, Edition No. 7

Free

WorldBriefs

Wind-up radio to wind up

Freeplay, manufacturer of the wind-up radio developed by a British inventor has decided to quit producing radios in South Africa and move production to China. The company said labour costs are the reason behind the decision, but the announcement has been greeted with anger in South Africa. 300 disabled workers will lose their jobs at a factory that was described by Nelson Mandela as a South African Success story. The company justifies its decision by pointing out that the unit cost of its radios can be slashed by 50% ,from around \$20 to \$10, when production switched to China. It also points out that huge tariffs of up to 40% apply in some African countries. According to the company, Africa as a whole will benefit in due course from the switch to Chinese production. (www.mw.nl)

Sexual slavery a war crime

In an historic move, the war crimes tribunal in The Hague convicted three Bosnian Serb generals for 'sexual enslavement' on 22 February; for the first time rape is being treated as a crime against humanity. 'This judgment sends a clear message to combatants involved in any conflict: that they will be held accountable at the international level -- and will be punished -- for holding women captive and subjecting them to sexual slavery,' Mike Dottridge, Director of Anti-Slavery International said. The ruling has wide implications for similar cases of sexual slavery in war, both in the subsequent Kosovo conflict and in wars around the world. Furthermore, it marks a significant step forward in the establishment of a permanent international criminal court.

China to "crack down" on Tibet

China's National People's Congress was told by vice-president Hu Jintao that his government will stamp out separatism and curb 'illegal' religious activities in Tibet, reports Xinhua. He also said China would ...Continued page 2

The awful truth is out there

BY MAGGIE SCOTT

The Awful Truth with Michael Moore (Tuesdays, SBS, 8pm) is a refreshing way to spend an evening in front of the tube. Yes, one might have to strain a wrist flicking to SBS, but once the inner rebel spawn is released, one will never go back to watching Charmed.

Michael Moore is writer/director /front man of this political documentary-style series. He is a large, bespectacled guy with plenty of facial hair and a baseball cap perched a little too high, a mad gleam in his eyes, and a bullshit detector the size of a Nike executive's pay cheque.

Moore and his team are dedicated to confronting the awful responsibilities that Americans face today: mass homelessness; police shootings and beatings; racism; lenient gun laws; sexism; injustices in the legal system; corporate malpractice; and right-wing conservatism, just to name a few.

Moore and his team show us just how much fun it is to expose the flaws in the system, then air them on national television. Fuelled by good ideas and a strong sense of justice, the show is carried by hilarious satire, stunts, anti-propaganda and very tight production skills.

Wherever possible, Moore uses a big dose of straight-faced irony to present his issues. "I'm Pistol Pete, I'm Pistol Pete, I'm a son-of-a-gun who's really neat!" sings the loveable, huggable, life-sized gun. He sings to a room full of excited children, accompanied by his guitar pluckin' assistant. Pistol Pete was created in response to Eddie the Eagle, spokes-eagle for The National Rifle Association of America. Eddie tells children to 'walk away from the gun' when they see one lying around. His message is that whilst guns have a dangerous nature, they are really harmless when you are old enough to handle them.

"Mmmm", reflects Moore, "I feel like Eddie isn't dealing with the real issue here". Pistol Pete on the other hand, knows that children play with guns and his message to the children is "I'm just a BIG tool! I don't kill people. Who does? We do!"

Moore sets up events and stunts that happen out on the street with passers-by as his participants. The Wallet Exchange is a big success. "ATTENTION! ATTENTION!" calls Mike, "NYC police are having a difficult time differentiating black wallets from guns." To reduce incidents of police shooting black people with keys, chocolate bars and wallets in their hands, Mike is trading day-glo orange wallets for black ones. He also gets legions of black people on the street to walk around with their hands in the air so that the police will know they are empty-handed.

Who else would set a real-life pimp running around telling every congressman he sees that they are prostituting themselves as congressional 'Hos'? "No self-respecting Ho just wants to cuddle up and talk about your problems. Where's the money in that? These Hos are after your cheddar, baby"...

Moore and his wily correspondents remain calm and persistent when approaching a corporation's building or a congress member's office. In just about every episode, the confronted become flustered or annoyed. They don't know what's going on or realise they look dumb and guilty and there's nothing they can do about it. Moore is the splinter underfoot, burrowing deeper.

"Get a real job!" yells George W. Bush when Moore challenges him to spend 10 seconds in his portable mosh pit in return for his endorsement. The Awful Truth has lots of fun with Bush in the editing suites

later on. Like all the other victims, he comes out looking stupid and guilty of heinous crimes.

Alan Keyes on the other hand, is the only presidential candidate who bravely takes on the mosh pit challenge. Keyes jumps right in to the throng of excitable youth moshing to Rage Against The Machine and, true to his word, Moore endorses him.

"He may be a right-wing lunatic", says Moore, "but he's our right wing lunatic".

Moore achieves what most people are too stumped by. He is quite a regular Joe

who shows us that effective action is not out of our reach. His strongest asset is his firm conviction in his power to make changes. He believes that human rights are mandatory and he demands that people know their rights. He shows us that activism can be fun.

What's more, it can be fun for the whole family. The Awful Truth's message seems to be "DO try this at home, kids".

Websites:- www.theawfultruth.com
- www.michaelmoore.com

Michael Moore seeking the awful truth

NMD - unraveling the path to nuclear disarmament

CLARE HENDERSON

NMD stands for National Missile Defence. Some call it Son of Star Wars, referring to Ronald Reagan's 1980s proposal for a Strategic Defence Initiative - which took on the name Star Wars.

The current United States proposal is a scaled down version of the 1980s one, yet essentially incorporates the same principles. Satellites are used to detect potentially hostile missile launches aimed at the United States. Then, using radars at US facilities in strategically located countries, the missiles are tracked and exploded by American missiles before reaching

American soil.

The main rationale presented for the NMD system is 'rogue states' - principally North Korea, Iran or Iraq - who according to US Government will develop over the next 10 to 15 years the capacity to launch missiles that are able to reach the US.

While there seems to be agreement that these countries may be on the verge of developing such weapons, it remains uncertain whether they have any inclination to use them.

At the same time the United States and Russia between them have around 5,000 nuclear war heads sitting on about 2,000 missiles, ready to

be launched at a minutes notice. The accidental launch of one of these weapons could pose a far greater threat than the so-called 'rogue states'.

Likewise, while there are questions about the costs and technical viability of the US NMD proposal, the key concern is that it will spark a new arms race. Russia is opposed and has indicated it will withdraw from existing nuclear disarmament agreements if the US proceeds, while China has indicated it will most likely increase its nuclear weapons and missile programs in reaction. Other countries may well respond the same way.

Last week the Medical Association

for Prevention of War (MAPW) called on the Federal Government to convene a public inquiry on Australia's potential involvement in NMD, and its progress towards nuclear disarmament generally.

"The Government seems hell-bent on supporting a technical system which will ensure continued reliance on nuclear weapons rather than pursuing the real goal -- abolition of nuclear weapons and their means of delivery" said Dr Wareham, National President of MAPW.

"If we are living with an expectation of a nuclear-weapons-free world, there is no need for missile defence

systems. Such a proposal is destabilizing, provocative, unnecessary, wasteful, and counter-productive," concluded Dr Wareham.

Australia's view on NMD will be important not only through political and diplomatic support, but also through the potential involvement of the joint US base at Pine Gap, in Central Australia. The exact role and importance of Pine Gap in the NMD plans are unclear.

Clare Henderson is the Executive Officer of the Medical Association for Prevention of War.

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speed up economic development in Tibet.

"While legal religious activities and interests of the religious sector will be protected, illegal activities under the cover of religion must be resolutely stopped and punished according to law," Xinhua quoted Mr Hu as saying.

He also said China would speed economic development in Tibet, saying it was important for "strengthening ethnic unity and maintaining the unity of the motherland", Xinhua said.

In January, the European Union called on China to stop its "patriotic education" campaign in Tibet, which critics say endangers the Buddhist culture of the vast region.

Rights groups and Tibetan exiles have criticised China's plans to build a railway and gas pipeline to Tibet, saying they would lead to increased Chinese migration and economic exploitation in areas mainly populated by Tibetans.

Millions face starvation

A prolonged drought has placed up to 70 million people at risk of hunger in the Horn of Africa region, says the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation.

Nearly all countries in the region - Tanzania, Kenya, Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia and Eritrea - are affected by the drought. Aid agencies, operating in the region, say up to 18 million people still need food aid.

The report blames the food shortages on civil strife and natural disasters. The countries affected by civil strife in Africa include the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Angola, Burundi and Guinea.

G8 blasted over nuclear plants

G8 environment ministers are today under renewed pressure from green activists to stick to promises made in 1992 for the closure of decrepit Soviet-designed nuclear plants in central and eastern Europe.

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Centralised decentralisation

SAM DE SILVA

The internet should remain a secure and accessible tool for social justice, say a Prague meeting of communication activists.

This was the core message addressed to governments and big business by a group of lawyers, computer programmers, academics, and communications activists from East and West Europe who gathered in February to plan a defense of the internet for social justice work.

The conference was organised by the Association for Communications (APC), an international association of not-for-profit organisations which promote the internet for social justice and development.

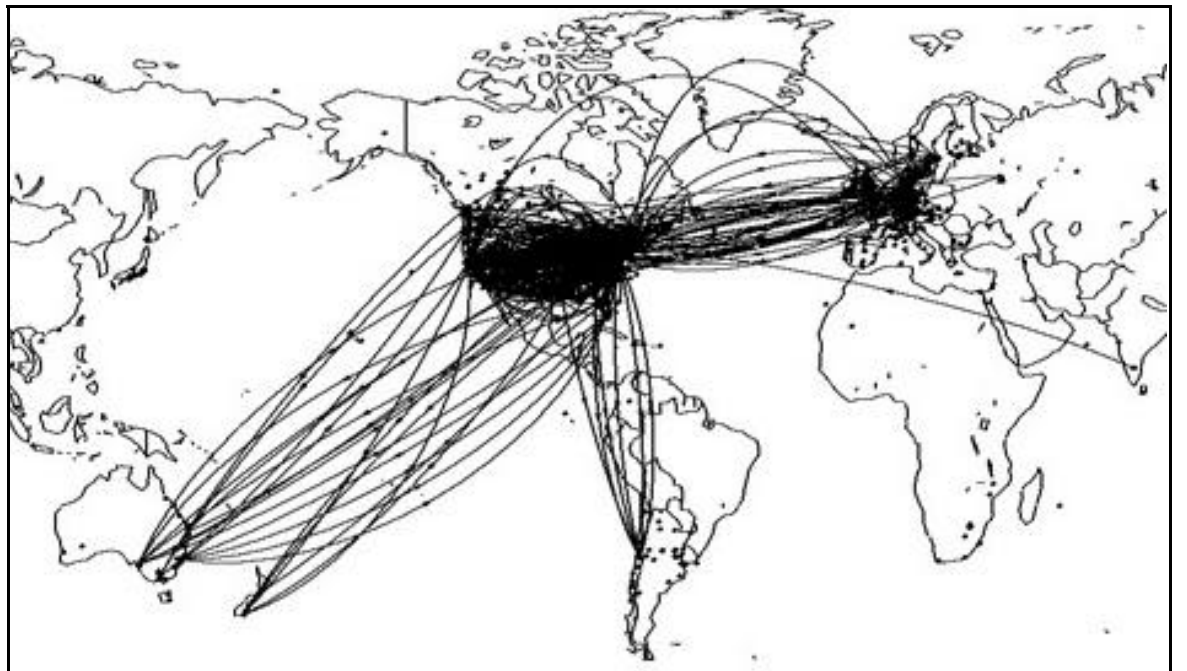
Participants pointed out that the rapid commercialisation of the internet and emerging global and national controls pose clear threats to what should be a free and open communications medium.

Karen Banks from GreenNet (UK) and APC Europe Internet Rights project manager said "APC is committed to giving a voice to activists and civil society groups who want to defend the Internet as an accessible and secure communications medium".

At the conclusion of the conference, the participants reached broad consensus that defending Internet rights is as much a defense of human rights as it is of people's right to communicate, regardless of where they live, social status, sex, political or religious belief.

Melbourne will soon be playing host to a meeting of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) which is a body responsible for technical coordination of the domain name system.

The internet is often described as a model for decentralisation and non-



Global internet pathways (www.cybergeography.com)

hierarchy, however its operation is dependent on a centralised hierarchy built into what is called the domain name system (DNS). A domain name is a web address, such as www.thepaper.org.au, which is needed to locate content and resources on the internet.

The DNS requires that the allocation of a domain name (ie. www.thepaper.org.au) can only occur once. No two people can own the same domain name. In the early days of the internet, this was easily managed by a number of volunteers but as it grew rapidly in the late 90s, ICANN was established by the United States Department of Commerce to coordinate the management of the DNS and its expansion.

ICANN meets regularly at various cities around the world. In Melbourne, it will discuss a number of issues including the expansion of domain names through the creation of new top level domains

including '.biz' and '.coop'. The suffix of a domain name address such as '.com' is referred to as a top level domain.

There is considerable opposition to ICANN. Critics such as ICANN Watch argue that the body "lacks much of the accountability normally found in corporations and in non-profits" because it has a unique relationship with the US Department of Commerce. Its website goes on to say "Democratic theory suggests that the absence of accountability tends to breed arbitrariness and self-dealing."

On its website, ICANN describes itself as an "open, transparent, and consensus-based body that is broadly representative of the diverse stakeholder communities of the global internet". It goes on to claim that ICANN's mandate is not to "run the Internet." Rather, it is to oversee the management of only those specific technical managerial and policy

development tasks that require central coordination such as the DNS.

However a member of ICANN's Board of Directors recently described it as "the regulator of a market worth about US \$50 billion".

Electronic Frontiers Australia chairperson Kimberly Heitman will be attending the Melbourne meeting and feels external pressure is important in ensuring ICANN's decision making process is open and transparent.

"The involvement of activists from outside narrow law-enforcement and commercial interests is essential", says Heitman.

ICANN meets at the Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre from 9th to 13th March.

For more information:
www.icann.org
www.icannwatch.org
www.efa.org

Gaza strip: Another day at work

BISSAN ADWAN

Calm morning, long line through the search corridors that separate the besieged Gaza strip and the labour camps on the other side of the green line.

An obvious anxiety besets the labourers making their way from their refugee camps through the Beit Hanoun crossing. An announcement over the radio tells of an explosion near the Kfar Darom Settlement. The announcement adds to the anxiety of the labourers, the fear of not being let through past the electric gates, the metal helmets, the bulldozers, the canine units.

Nervous movement is detected throughout the occupation forces, machine guns drawn, pointing towards the frozen line of humanity, perhaps for intimidation, perhaps for another more malicious reason. Total obedience to the whim of the Israeli employers!

"My employer is a good man" says one of the labourers with trepidation. "In spite of the Intifada, there will always be a place for me, he told me

not to fear the tactics of the occupation forces, they are just obeying orders, what is important is for us to get to our work." He continues. "We have to get paid, we have many commitments, children to feed, school and university fees, medical expenses for my father. How else can we fulfil our obligations? We have to work."

Endless hours of lining up, of repetitive procedures, maybe they have become accustomed to it, disrobing five hundred meters for the check point, detention in spite of the presence of all the necessary documents. "Every time there is a closure we are forced to get new documents", someone mumbles out, "It costs 120 shekels for every new set of documents."

Denial of entry is a death sentence. How to feed the open mouths that await? There are no alternatives in Gaza, no factories, no industry, no work, no end to the degradation.

Ahmed Ayoob Al-Shanbary, an injured labourer, described how he ended up being shot at the Erez crossing when he was working in Natania. "Someone in the line com-

plained that they were late for work. It was already past eight. We had queued up for what seemed like endless hours, and they weren't letting us through. There was unrest, and before we knew what hit us we were being shot at, one bullet found its way into my left thigh." He went on, "When I recuperated I went to the authorities to acquire new documents, only to find out I've been banned for life."

Nine hundred and ninety labourers headed to the Beit Hanoun Crossing after the occupation forces allowed them to go back to their jobs. "I go to work as though I will never come back," says one of the labourers, "And when I return, it is as though God has given me a new lease on life."

It is a place not much different from Israel, it just happens to be on the border where you have occupation forces, body searches, beating, degradation, and, a lot of times, a place of detention.

In spite of never ending Israeli intimidation and the constant hindrances, the Palestinian labourers keep com-

ing back to work under a barrage of bullets courtesy of the Israeli occupation forces. Said another of the labourers, "We suffer all sorts of cruelties in silence, to keep our only source of income, for we have no other alternatives."

The end of a workday in the industrial zone doesn't necessarily mean the labourers' troubles are over. Three men from the Hamdan family on their way back were interrogated, beaten, and then taken to an undisclosed location by the occupation forces. They have a special cell for the detainees at the Beit Hanoun crossing. Rafiqu Al-Yazjee was detained there. He was charged with stoning the occupation soldiers during a confrontation inside the zone, according to the wife of Kammal Shahateh Hamdan, who was released after posting a six thousand-shekel bail bond. Hamdan told us that according to the occupation forces, he was charged with threatening to kill his employer if he was not paid by the end of the month. "That's not true", said Hamdan. "I simply asked for my pay, because I wanted to leave at the

end of the month. My employer started to beat on me, and before I knew it all the soldiers guarding the plant I worked in were taking turns beating me with the butts of their guns. Then I was led to a detention cell near the industrial zone where I was interrogated. Every time I refused to confess that I had threatened the life of my employer, I was beaten up some more." He went on to say, "I don't want to work there any more. I don't want to dip the bread I feed my children with, in degradation and humiliation. What will it get us? Humiliation, beatings, degradation, and perhaps orphaning my children."

The workday ends as it starts. A small gate, room for only one person at a time, leads to a corridor five hundred meters long, three meters wide, surrounded by concrete barriers. There is nothing but the pail blueness of the sky straight above, and the labourer under the constant watchful eyes of the occupation force's cameras and computers, giving orders to proceed or be detained.

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Suspect fix-it contracts in Central and Eastern Europe for the West's desperate nuclear industry have resulted in the operational lives of dangerous reactors being extended. Experts in European governments and NGOs are highly critical of the dubious safety assessments and methodologies carried out to justify so-called 'safety improvements' in old plants already officially declared 'non-upgradable'.

Torture Egyptian police custody
Amnesty International has described as "widespread and indiscriminate" incidents of torture and ill-treatment in Egyptian police stations and detention centres. Launching a report today, entitled "Egypt: Torture Remains Rife as Cries for Justice Go Unheeded," the human rights organization stressed that "No one is safe from harm." The majority of victims, who include women, the young and the elderly, are held in police stations in connection with criminal investigations.

CONTACT The Paper

Email: info@thepaper.org.au

Postal Address:
The Paper
PO Box 1733
Collingwood, VIC 3066
Australia

Tel: 0419 809 742

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Yallourn Energy: the views of Jayde and John

CARLENE WILSON

Jayde and John are in Year seven. They are articulate, bright young people with strong opinions. Their Dad has fifteen million dollars worth of writs against him and an injunction that could see him imprisoned.

What did their Dad do to be in this position? He turned the power off at Hazelwood, along with the rest of his workmates in the power stations in the La Trobe Valley. On November 2 the power went out in Melbourne for four hours. Now Iain and his family and over a dozen others in the Valley are living with the consequences of that action.

Jayde and John know what's going on in the power industry and they understand why their Dad and his

Exposed! Melbourne's Grand Prix contract

The following story has been sourced from the website www.crikey.com.au

KEVIN SUMMERS

Few people could pinpoint the Netherland Antilles on a map of the world. This surviving outpost of the Dutch Empire basks in the southern Caribbean Sea, off the coast of Venezuela, a chain of small islands and atolls, the best known of which is Curacao. It is, by all accounts, a surprisingly prosperous place, a fact that has more to do with its status as a tax haven than tourism. Financial dealings are pleasantly discreet.

Victorian taxpayers will be interested to know that many of their dollars have found their way to this haven on the other side of the world. The Netherlands Antilles is the first port of call for the millions paid to Formula One boss, Bernie Ecclestone, for the rights to stage the Grand Prix at Albert Park.

The current figure is eighteen million Australian dollars but is paid in American dollars to an account in the Antilles. The figure escalates 10% annually. The charge is similar to those paid for other grand prix where the figures are not veiled in secrecy: Hungary (1997), South Korea (1998), and England (Brands Hatch, 2002).

But Ecclestone's money trail does not stop in the Caribbean. The Economist (15/7/00) reported that the fee is likely to find its way to a Swiss bank account of an Ecclestone trust, then on to Jersey in the Channel Islands (beyond British tax jurisdiction) with a company called SLEC Holdings. An arrangement

The Economist termed "an elaborate tax avoidance scheme."

In paying the \$18m., the Grand Prix Corporation purchases the trackside advertising rights which normally reside with Ecclestone. The corporation is free to on sell space to poten-



Billboard promoting the Grand Prix: This is living for some

tial advertisers. The contract also allows the Grand Prix Corporation to purchase the local television rights, which it then sells to Kerry Packer's Nine Network. At the race's completion all footage reverts to the ownership of Ecclestone. The Corporation is required to provide Ecclestone and his retinue with extensive hospitality facilities. This is called "The Paddock Club" and is similar to arrangements made at other F1 venues. A half acre concrete floor is provided for a F1 mobile digital television studio.

The penalty for failure to have the circuit ready for the running of the race varies annually but is currently about \$25m. This clause would have been in the mind of Melbourne's power behind the GP, businessman Ron Walker, when the race was endangered by oil placed on the track by protestors a few years ago.

The cancellation clauses entirely favour Ecclestone. He may cancel the contract if the race is not run to his satisfaction. Interestingly, he may

cancel the contract if its terms are released into the public domain. This fact was alluded to in the recent Audit Review of Government Contracts, basically a public relations exercise by the Bracks Government to signify its accountability and honesty.

While the review panel examined the contract, it stated that "it has not been authorised to disclose its terms as to do so would conflict with the government's wish to continue to stage the event." (Vol. 2, p.202)

Both Ron Walker and Bernie Ecclestone have successfully arranged for the transference of a vast amount of taxpayers' money to remain hidden from public gaze. This is not surprising as they are men of great power and influence. But a number of eyes have seen the document and it was only a matter of time before its contents were revealed by individuals who could see no valid reason for secrecy.

Walker won't be happy. He can, however, hardly complain. After all, he has done very nicely out the Grand Prix. He has formed a close business and personal relationship with Ecclestone. So close in fact that he has been a key player in Ecclestone's Formula One financial dealings.

Alliance Against Uranium

In a move to get opposition to uranium back on the national political agenda, the Alliance Against Uranium met in Port Augusta in February. The meeting, notable for having around 40 Aboriginal representatives, compared to only 10 representatives from environmental groups, focussed on issues affecting South Australia.

On February 21 the Beverley Uranium Mine was opened, while the site for a nuclear waste dump planned for the state was identified by govern-

ment late last year.

Irati-Wanti, a campaign against the dump run by the senior Aboriginal women of Kupa Piti (Coober Pedy), were present at the meeting. "A strong resolution to continue communication between the groups involved with the issues came out of the meeting," said Nina Brown, an Irati-Wanti employee.

"The meeting provided a space where different communities could talk to each other about similar experiences

and slowly develop relationships", said Bruce Thompson of Friends of the Earth.

The Port Augusta meeting was the fourth for the Alliance Against Uranium, and will be followed by a national anti-uranium meeting organised by Friends of the Earth in mid-March.

Other references:
www.iratiwanti.org
www.sea-us.org.au
www.foe.org.au/

Falun Gong leader Nobel Prize nominee

Falun Gong leader Li Hongzhi has been nominated for this years Nobel Peace Prize.

The last few years have seen growing controversy surrounding the group which the Chinese state is attempting to denounce as an 'evil cult'. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhu Bangzao is concerned that the Peace Prize is being used to achieve 'ulterior motives'.

Having officially banned the movement China says that to award the prize to Li would be encouraging a criminal.

Since being outlawed by the State many Falun Gong members have maintained peaceful protest against the ban, a protest that Li encourages.

Early this year a number of alleged Falun Gong members set themselves alight in Tianmen Square. Many practitioners denounced this action as a stunt by the Chinese government to further marginalise the group.

Last year Walker brokered a deal in which in which investment banker Hellman and Friedman sold its 37.5% stake in Ecclestone's Formula One Administration for \$2.4 billion. This was shortly after the bank bought that share for \$1.2 billion.

Walker's success fee can only be speculated upon (BRW suggested \$100 million last year) but on current dealing trends it would amount to scores of millions of dollars. Matt Wade reported the affair in the Sydney Morning Herald (22/3/00) and quoted Mark Carnegie, the son of Walker's former business partner Sir Roderick Carnegie and Hellman and Friedman's man in Australia: "Mr. Walker did a very, very good job of bringing the parties together," Carnegie junior said.

Another businessman who took part in the deal was Brian Powers, the managing director of Hellman and Friedman, formerly Kerry Packer's Chief Executive at Consolidated Press and now Chairman of Fairfax. All very cosy. At least these operations were in the public domain and subject to some scrutiny. Victorians have never had the opportunity to survey the Grand Prix contract. Hopefully the release of the above information will open a floodgate or two.

Update - Cockatoo Island Tent Embassy

The Supreme Court of NSW handed down its verdict on the Aboriginal Tent Embassy on Cockatoo Island in Sydney on Monday 5th March.

The court found that the occupants of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy were trespassing on Commonwealth land and has given them seven days to leave the Island.

The Cockatoo Island Aboriginal Tent Embassy was established 20th November 2000 by a group of people claiming the land under Aboriginal sovereignty.

After the verdict was handed down, Isabell Coe, one of the occupants said she has no confidence in the system of law that decided the case.

The occupants are planning to appeal their case to the High Court.

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Privatisation blues at the Melbourne Freight Terminal

ORWELL VONNEGUT

The workers don't mind the constant roar of machinery, the disgruntled truck drivers or the increasing workload. But some things about the place are bringing them down.

Under-staffing and injuries have reduced the workforce to a skeleton crew, privatisation is imminent and management has come up with yet another roster, which would see a significant reduction in workers' pay, not to mention the loss of six jobs. The future is very uncertain.

These facts have cast a feeling of doom over National Rail's Melbourne Freight Terminal, like a heavy cloud of diesel fumes. The workers move with listlessness and their postures suggest they are labouring under a heavy weight.

National Rail is part owned by the Federal, NSW and Victorian governments and is responsible for the distribution of freight throughout the country. The company runs 300 scheduled trains per week, carries more than 400,000 tonnes of freight per year for 500 customers. At the hub of this massive operation is the Melbourne Freight Terminal.

Managing Director, Vince Graham, in a recent email to all National Rail employees, said that he didn't expect the sale to begin before the end of March. Among those expected to vie for the rail network are the transport group, Toll Holdings (Australia's biggest long-haul road transport organisation), West Australian conglomerate Wesfarmers Ltd. and some of America's rail giants.

I was approached by three of National Rail's terminal operators - those responsible for driving cranes and forklifts, shunting and train examining - who wanted to voice their concerns about their future at the organisation. We met at the Oasis Hotel in North Melbourne, one of their favourite watering holes. The trio included John Jones (a.k.a. 'The Bear'), Jim Hart and Allan Grey.

'The Bear' is 50 years old, has three sons and a house in Dandenong, which he is still paying off. He was hit hard by Paul Keating's recession, losing his job at SPC. He spent years in and out of employment, struggling with the mortgage on his house and the feeling of uselessness unemployment brings. He knows only too well the impermanence of seemingly secure jobs and he understands the signs that precede a company's demise.

Jim Hart has worked in the rail industry for the past nine years. He was a shunter in the old V-Line days, when things seemed a little more prosperous. Jim, who is 40, is also contending with a mortgage and three sons. He tries to remain positive about the future, in spite of the negativity at the Melbourne Freight Terminal.

Allan, 26, is newer to the workforce, but has worked at National Rail for most of his working life. He considers

every question deeply but seems marginally less concerned about his future, possibly due to his youth. He has one young daughter to his estranged wife and is deeply devoted to his fatherly duties. Allan is still critical of the way things are being run at National Rail. "It's a grouse job. It's just mismanaged," he says. "The job's alright. The guy's are good," adds Jim.

But the response from 'the Bear' is a bit more critical. "Morale's rock bottom in the place. Again they (management) are trying to screw us. There's no positive attitudes at National Rail at the moment," he growls.

Since National Rail began operating in mid-1993, as part of the Government's rail reform program, it has been in a precarious position. It was given the enormous task of turning around a huge inherited debt. Sadly for its anxious employees, it has failed.

In those early days of 1993, there were around 100 terminal operators working in the Melbourne Freight Terminal. This number has now dwindled to 60. This situation has not come about through mass sackings, but a natural attrition of employees, with the organisation unwilling to replace workers. Consequently, terminal operators will now park cranes and forklifts when they are due for a break. Quite often there is nobody to relieve them, so machines remain idle, while impatient truck-drivers wait.

Located on Dynon Road, Footscray, the Melbourne Freight Terminal has a unique view of the city skyline to the east. At night the vista offers a distraction from the boredom of loading and stripping trains. The work is ritualistic and the men perform it with a robotic precision.

An hour in the place will see you dirtied by diesel fumes. The deafening roar of trucks, cranes, forklifts, locomotives, crossing bells and warning sirens bombard you constantly. Despite this, the Terminal holds a certain charm for its employees. They've grown attached to it...and to their workmates.

Naturally enough, privatisation is central to their fears about the future. Jim says, "If it becomes privatised, good and bad ... um, we don't know, if it's an American company, it's gonna be slash and burn. They'll slash and burn our wages. You know that. Do you want a contract? Do you wanna become a full-time temp (temporary employee)?"

You might be on call, I suggest. "On call?" asks Jim, a hint of bitterness in his voice. The idea is repugnant to him. "On call," Allan says, spitting the words out as if they are something foul tasting. "Load of rubbish."

"It's just so depressing," adds 'The Bear', sipping his beer and sinking deeper into his chair.



On Friday 2nd March, the members of Ross House 'reclaimed' Flinders Lane for a Street Festival. Ross House is a five storey building centrally located in inner Melbourne, offering resources to a diverse range of self-help and small community groups.

Looking back from 2050: an organic perspective

The following speech was delivered to the Organic Federation Australia Workshop.

ROD MAY

The Garden party in power, with no serious rivals.

Commonwealth still entertaining debate on republicanism. King Henry 9th still the Monarch after King Charles saw the Monarchy resurge into popularity with the total conversion of British Agriculture to organic during his 20 year reign.

Practically all agriculture now know as organoculture is based on the principles of organic agriculture laid down in the late 20th century. In fact chemicals in agriculture were banned before 2020 as part of a UN security initiative to disallow any form of human activity which degraded the natural and human resource base.

In Australia at the initiative of the garden party a green consumer democrat alliance which wrested power from the Liberal/Labour Coalition only a few years into the millennium, the smokescreen was lifted on 20th Century agriculture and complete and objective resource and energy accounting revealed that only organic agriculture could be justified as an integrated and sustainable land and water use.

Amidst the plethora of quality management systems which were spawned in the 20th Century only organic farming standards were seen to contain any hard and quantifiable criteria.

These were enhanced and extended prior to 2010 to include issues of carbon sequestrations, analogue biodiversity, transport coefficients, and issue of social justice and fair trade.

These issues were entirely embraced for their intrinsic worth and not just for their capacity to satisfy international trade requirements.

International trade is still in place, although burgeoning regional populations brought about by the decentralisation of organic agriculture sees almost all produce consumed regionally.

There were significant institutional

changes which accompanied the transition to global organoculture. The Agricultural Crimes Tribunal is now a United Nations instrument. In fact Monsanto's Board of Directors were indicted and required to be WWOOFERS for the term of their natural lives. WTO was placed under the guidance of the International Union of Ecologists.

Competition policy principles were abandoned and replaced by 'Co-Operative' policy principles. The Australia and New Zealand Food Authority was disbanded after massive class action brought against them by the Society of Bioregional Producers. The organic industry was strongly represented in the cotton and beef sectors who had been the driving force behind the growth in the organic sector early in the 21st Century, the pork and olive industries, and the now massive Australian Consumers Association.

Within the organic institutions there were over 2000 certified organisations all accredited by IFOAM Australia.

Technical progress in organic agriculture has been mind boggling over the past 50 years, since the banning of gene splicing and GMO's by the UN after some of the tragedies of 2005.

Breakthroughs in the understanding of symbiotics, sometimes referred to as companion planting, now constituted a vast body of knowledge based largely on the mid 20th Century discoveries of James Lovelock.

Gene Jockeys were still practicing illegally in parts of Iran and Brazil, but even these two superpowers were focused on the rich field of microbiological ecology and with the assistance of the vast spectrum of nanotechnology were new leaders in the application of organic farming principles to redress the ravages of desertification and deforestation.

Symbiotics resulted in such an integration of agriculture into the environmental that there was a blurring of the edge of agriculture and wilderness. Nature was no longer a zoo in an ocean of agricultural destruction.

Farming is now practised by 80% of all Australians. But the spectrum of

farming activities is huge. Vast insect farming, iguana industry, the amphibian sector, none farming in monoculture, now provided critical services to the horticultural and grain industry themselves entirely transformed by organic agriculture to permit the ever increasing sequestration of C and biodiversity. There are no longer significant pests and diseases as they were once known. Non core species to any enterprise are valued not only for their intrinsic contribution to ecological balance, but for the many commercial uses to which they may be put.

Fertility is once again returning to depleted lands. As C levels increase and microbiological diversity is increased, and as increased processing and consumption take place regionally, nutrients return to farming systems is made possible.

Nanotechnology and cold fusion have helped shape the face of modern industry, but the ongoing exploration of the yet to be fully discovered natural world would still head up the frontier of human endeavour. The precautionary principle was applied to agriculture only in the Nick of Time, seemingly in time to rescue the planet and life, with the profound realisation of the interrelatedness of all things.

Looking back, it is clear that a major feature of change was that it was consumer driven. The most important step thought by many to have led to the consolidation of organic agriculture was the democratisation of information and the entrenchment of comprehensive and truthful labelling and information for consumers. Governments and powerful organisations quickly lost their grip on the control of trade and consumption. The explosion in communications and AI has been said by many commentators to be the catalyst for the change of direction so conveniently denied to consumers in the 20th Century.